AMAR CHITRA KATHA

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Tales of Arjuna



Amar Chitra Katha: the Glorious Heritage of India

IBH

Tales of Arjuna

Arjuna was as devoted to Krishna as Hanuman was to Rama. Our first story, which is based on a folktale popular in South India, is about the encounter between Arjuna and Hanuman both of whom come to realise that Rama and Krishna are one and the same.

Arjuna was trained by Drona, the master of archery, and he acquired powerful weapons by propitiating the gods. But the weapon that made him invincible was his mighty bow, Gandiva, which he obtained from Agni.

Arjuna and his cousin, Krishna, were inseparable, and it was to Krishna that he always turned for guidance. In the battle of Kurukshetra, Krishna acted as Arjuna's charioteer.

There were, however, occasions when Arjuna became vain and boastful. The third story shows how Krishna gently, but firmly, corrected Arjuna on such occasions.

Script: Lopamudra

Artworks: C.M. Vitankar

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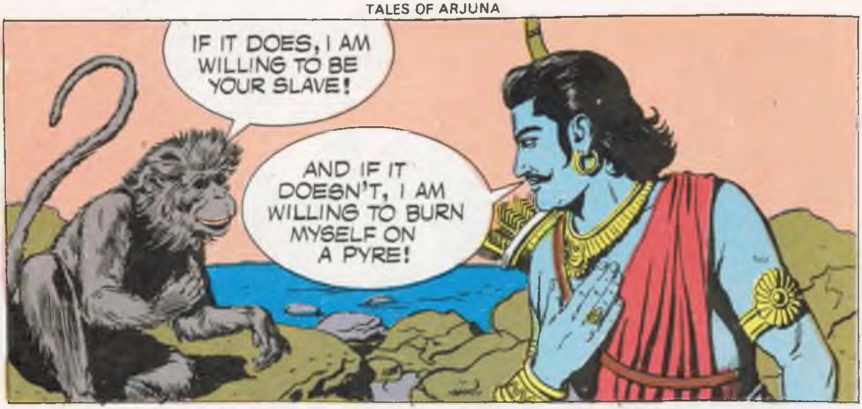


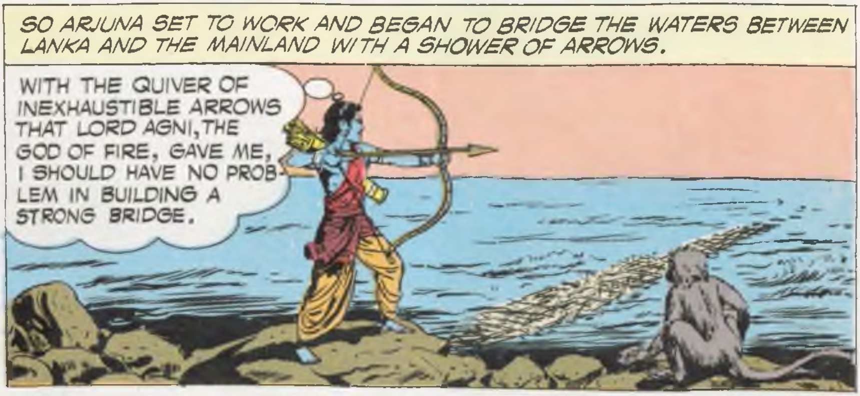
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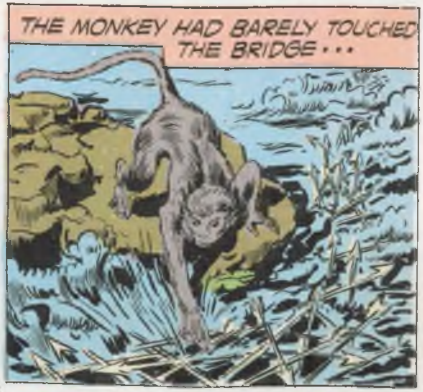
* IN COASTAL TAMIL NADU


THE BRAHMAN WENT HIS WAY BUT A MONKEY, WHICH WAS FOLLOWING ARJUNA, BURST OUT LAUGHING.
HA! HA! HO! HO! HA!
SURPRISED, ARJUNA TURNED ROUND—
A BRIDGE OF ARROWS WOULD HAVE COLLAPSED UNDER THE WEIGHT OF THE MONKEYS!
ARJUNA WAS A LITTLE ANNOYED BY THE MONKEY'S AUDACITY.
MERE MONKEYS COULD BREAK A BRIDGE OF MIGHTY RAMA'S ARROWS! IMPOSSIBLE! WHY, NO MONKEY COULD CRUSH A BRIDGE OF EVEN MY ARROWS!
I CHALLENGE THAT! A BRIDGE MADE WITH YOUR ARROWS WON'T WITHSTAND EVEN MY WEIGHT, PUNY AS I AM.


IF IT DOES, I AM WILLING TO BE YOUR SLAVE!
AND IF IT DOESN'T, I AM WILLING TO BURN MYSELF ON A PYRE!


SO ARJUNA SET TO WORK AND BEGAN TO BRIDGE THE WATERS BETWEEN LANKA AND THE MAINLAND WITH A SHOWER OF ARROWS.
WITH THE QUIVER OF INEXHAUSTIBLE ARROWS THAT LORD AGNI, THE GOD OF FIRE, GAVE ME, I SHOULD HAVE NO PROBLEM IN BUILDING A STRONG BRIDGE.


AS SOON AS THE BRIDGE WAS READY—
THERE! YOU CAN TEST IT.


THE MONKEY HAD BARELY TOUCHED THE BRIDGE . . .


...WHEN IT COLLAPSED!
NO! I CAN'T BELIEVE IT! I'LL TRY AGAIN.
THIS TIME ARJUNA SHOT THE ARROWS CLOSER, LEAVING NO GAPS BETWEEN THEM.
NOW TEST IT!
THIS IS STRONGER THAN I EXPECTED! I'LL WALK A BIT FURTHER.
BUT HE HAD HARDLY TAKEN A FEW MORE STEPS WHEN—
I HAVE LOST! I SHALL GET THE PYRE READY.


THE PYRE WAS MADE AND ARJUNA WAS ABOUT TO JUMP INTO THE FLAMES—
WAIT!


WHY DO YOU WANT TO GIVE UP YOUR LIFE?


ARJUNA AND THE MONKEY TOLD HIM ABOUT THE BET—
BUT A BET THAT HAD NO WITNESS IS NOT VALID.
I DON'T KNOW WHO YOU ARE AND WHY YOU WANT TO SAVE MY LIFE. BUT...


...I AM AFRAID YOUR WORDS ARE BORN MORE OUT OF KINDNESS THAN OUT OF LOVE FOR TRUTH.
HOW CAN YOU BE SURE THAT THE BRIDGE COLLAPSED BECAUSE OF THE MONKEY'S WEIGHT? THERE WAS NO ONE PRESENT TO JUDGE THAT!


WHY DON'T YOU TWO COMPETE AGAIN AND LET ME BE THE JUDGE?
THAT'S A BETTER SUGGESTION.
AS SOON AS THE BRIDGE WAS READY, THE MONKEY BEGAN WALKING ACROSS IT.
WHAT'S HAPPENING TO ME? MY STRENGTH IS LEAVING ME! I FEEL WEAK!
I'LL TAKE ON THE FORM I TOOK WHEN I LEAPT ACROSS THE OCEAN IN SEARCH OF SITA.
THE MONKEY MADE HIMSELF AS LARGE AS A MOUNTAIN...



... AND JUMPED UP AND DOWN ON THE BRIDGE.
WHAT ! THE BRIDGE STILL STANDS! I CAN'T BELIEVE IT! ONLY KRISHNA.... WHY, OF COURSE THE BOY IS KRISHNA!



AT THE SAME MOMENT, THE MONKEY, TOO, REALISED THE TRUTH.
WHAT A VAIN FOOL I HAVE BEEN. OF COURSE IT IS THE LORD HIMSELF!



RAMA!
KRISHNA!


AND LO! IN THE PLACE OF THE BOY STOOD LORD VISHNU.
YES IT IS I ! BOTH OF YOU NEEDED TO BE TAUGHT A LESSON IN HUMILITY. YOU, ARJUNA, WERE TOO VAIN.


AND YOU, HANUMAN, WERE TOO PROUD OF YOUR STRENGTH.


HANUMAN, TO FULFIL THE CONDITIONS OF YOUR WAGER YOU SHALL BE ON ARJUNA'S FLAG.

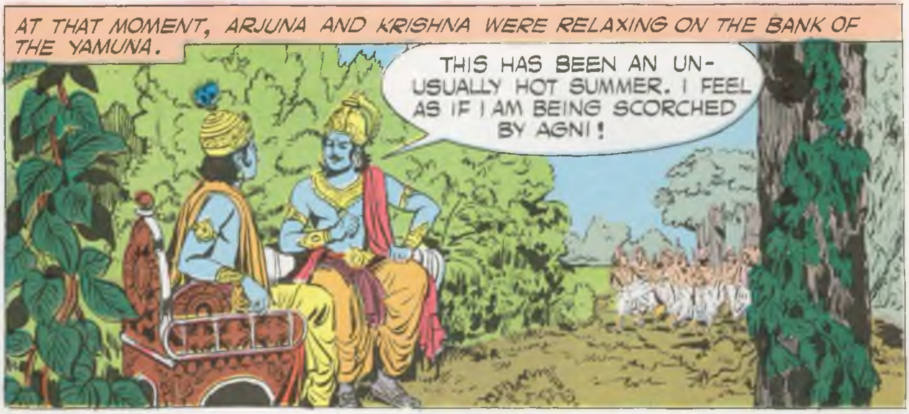


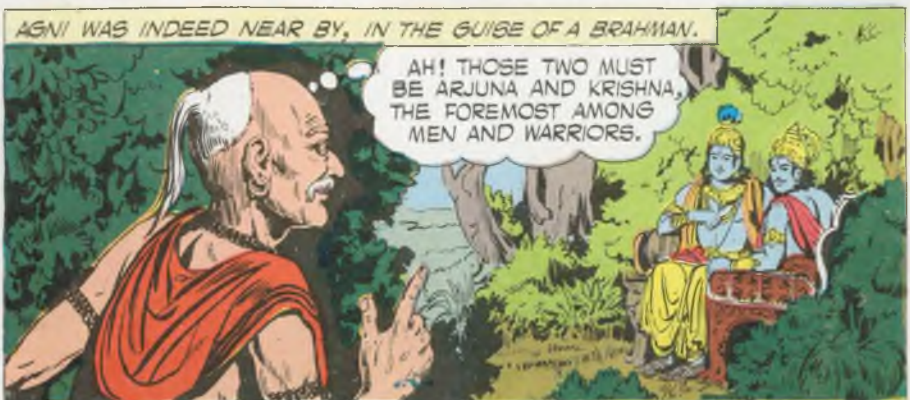
* CLARIFIED BUTTER


BUT DON'T WORRY. CONSUME THE KHANDAVA FOREST, AND YOU WILL REGAIN YOUR LUSTRE.
AGNI HASTENED TO THE KHANDAVA FOREST AND BEGAN TO BLAZE, MUCH TO THE DISMAY OF INDRA.
IF I DON'T STOP THIS, MY FRIEND, TAKSHAKA, KING OF THE NAGAS, AND HIS FOLLOWERS WILL PERISH IN THE BURNING FOREST!
SO INDRA SENT DOWN HEAVY SHOWERS.

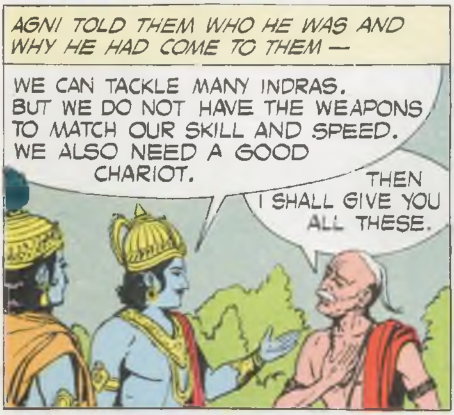

AGNI WENT BACK TO BRAHMA.
LORD, INDRA IS BENT ON THWARTING ME! WHAT SHOULD I DO?

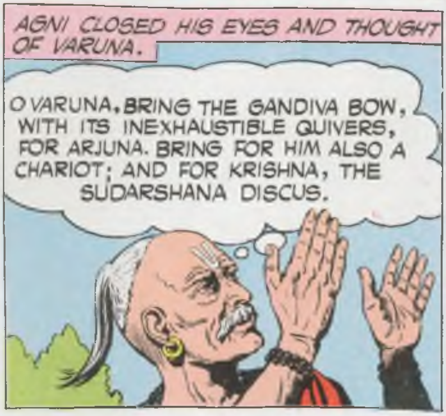

THERE ARE ONLY TWO PERSONS WHO CAN HELP YOU: THE VALIANT HEROES, ARJUNA AND KRISHNA. GO TO THEM. THEY ARE NOW NEAR THE KHANDAVA FOREST.


AT THAT MOMENT, ARJUNA AND KRISHNA WERE RELAXING ON THE BANK OF THE YAMUNA.
THIS HAS BEEN AN UN-USUALLY HOT SUMMER. I FEEL AS IF I AM BEING SCORCHED BY AGNI!


AGNI WAS INDEED NEAR BY, IN THE GUISE OF A BRAHMAN.
AH! THOSE TWO MUST BE ARJUNA AND KRISHNA, THE FOREMOST AMONG MEN AND WARRIORS.


I AM A HUNGRY BRAHMAN. GRATIFY ME BY GIVING ME A LOT OF FOOD.
TELL US WHAT YOU WISH TO EAT, HOLY ONE, AND WE SHALL TRY TO GIVE IT TO YOU.


AGNI TOLD THEM WHO HE WAS AND WHY HE HAD COME TO THEM —
WE CAN TACKLE MANY INDRAS. BUT WE DO NOT HAVE THE WEAPONS TO MATCH OUR SKILL AND SPEED. WE ALSO NEED A GOOD CHARIOT.
THEN I SHALL GIVE YOU ALL THESE.


AGNI CLOSED HIS EYES AND THOUGHT OF VARUNA.
O VARUNA, BRING THE GANDIVA BOW, WITH ITS INEXHAUSTIBLE QUIVERS, FOR ARJUNA. BRING FOR HIM ALSO A CHARIOT; AND FOR KRISHNA, THE SUDARSHANA DISCUS.


IN A FLASH, VARUNA PLACED ALL THE WEAPONS AND THE CHARIOT BEFORE HIM.
ALL THIS IS YOURS.
O AGNI! WITH THESE WEAPONS NO ONE CAN WITHSTAND US. NOW EAT AS MUCH AS YOU LIKE! SURROUND THE FOREST WITH FIRE.


URGED ON BY THEM, AGNI CHANGED HIS FORM. HE THEN BROKE OUT INTO SEVEN FLAMES AND SURROUNDED THE FOREST, SETTING IT ABLAZE ON ALL SIDES. AS THE FLAMES ROSE HIGH, KRISHNA TURNED TO ARJUNA.
I'LL TAKE ON THE DENIZENS OF THE FOREST AND YOU TAKE ON INDRA AND THE CELESTIALS.
AS THEY POSTED THEMSELVES ON OPPOSITE SIDES OF THE FOREST, THE SKIES SUDDENLY DARKENED.
THUNDERCLOUDS! INDRA HAS STRUCK AGAIN!
THE NEXT MOMENT THE RAIN CAME DOWN IN TORRENTS.
THE FOREST, CHOKED WITH SMOKE AND STRUCK BY LIGHTNING, WAS FEARFUL TO LOOK AT.
I MUST BE QUICK! AT THIS RATE AGNI WILL BE SMOTHERED.
ARJUNA STOPPED THE SHOWER WITH A SHOWER OF HIS OWN...


... TILL THE FOREST WAS COVERED WITH A CANOPY OF ARROWS.
THERE! NOT A DROP OF RAIN SHALL TOUCH AGNI. NOT A SINGLE CREATURE SHALL ESCAPE!
BUT, THE NEXT MOMENT, INDRA RAISED A VIOLENT GALE ...
... THAT HIT ARJUNA.


WHEN ARJUNA REGAINED CONSCIOUSNESS HE WAS FURIOUS.
I WILL NOT REST TILL I'VE VANQUISHED YOU, O KING OF THE DEVAS!
AND HE BEGAN TO AIM HIS ARROWS AT INDRA IN THE SKIES.
INDRA RETORTED WITH THUNDER AND FLASHES OF LIGHTNING.
SUDDENLY ALL WAS QUIET —
THE ENERGY HAS GONE OUT OF MY THUNDER!
THE WIND HAS BLOWN AWAY ALL THE CLOUDS. ARJUNA HAS USED THE VAYAVYA WEAPON AGAINST ME!



THE NEXT MOMENT THE SKY WAS CLEAR. THE SUN SHONE BRIGHTLY AND A COOL BREEZE FANNED AGNI AS HE BLAZED AFRESH. SUDDENLY —
KRISHNA! LOOK! IT'S INDRA AND THE DEVAS!
AND LOOK! ON THE OTHER SIDE THE ASURAS AND NAGAS ARE CHARGING FORWARD!
ARJUNA, YOU TAKE ON THE DEVAS...
...AND I'LL DEAL WITH THE ASURAS AND NAGAS.
KRISHNA SENT HIS DISCUS FLYING THROUGH THE AIR, AND THE NAGAS AND ASURAS FLED IN TERROR. MEANWHILE, ARJUNA COUNTERED THE ATTACK OF THE DEVAS SO SKILFULLY...


... THAT THEY RETREATED IN PANIC. INDRA COULD NOT HELP ADMIRING ARJUNA.
MY DEVAS ARE TURNING AWAY IN FEAR! ARJUNA HAS SURPASSED HIMSELF.
BUT, ALL THE SAME, HE SENT DOWN A SHOWER OF STONES.
LET ME SEE THE EXTENT OF YOUR MIGHT.
BUT ARJUNA QUICKLY WARDED OFF THE SHOWER WITH HIS ARROWS.
INDRA THEN TORE UP THE PEAK OF THE MANDARA MOUNTAIN ...


...AND HURLED IT AT ARJUNA.
BUT ARJUNA SMASHED IT W HIS ARROWS.
I AM PLEASED! HIS VALOUR IS UNMATCHED! AND KRISHNA HAS VANQUISHED THE ASURAS AND NAGAS WITH HIS DISCUS! IF IT WERE NOT FOR TAKSHAKA I WOULD....
AT THAT MOMENT A VOICE ECHOED FROM THE HEAVENS.
YOUR FRIEND, TAKSHAKA, IS SAFE. WHEN THE FIRE BROKE OUT, HE WAS AT KURUKSHETRA, O INDRA! NO ONE CAN DEFEAT ARJUNA AND KRISHNA. AND THE DESTRUCTION OF KHANDAVA HAS BEEN ORDAINED BY FATE. SO GIVE UP THE FIGHT.
AS THEY SAW INDRA RETREATING, ARJUNA AND KRISHNA LEAPT FOR JOY.


SUDDENLY —
LOOK, IT'S THE ASURA, MAYA! HE WAS HIDING IN THAT CAVE! I'LL GET HIM WITH MY DISCUS.
BUT HE HAD BARELY RAISED HIS DISCUS...
... WHEN THE ASURA FLED TO ARJUNA.
O ARJUNA, PROTECT ME!
SINCE YOU ASK FOR MY PROTECTION, YOU SHALL HAVE IT.
ARJUNA HAS GIVEN HIS WORD. LEAVE HIM ALONE, AGNI.


WHEN QUIET WAS RESTORED, AGNI BLAZED FORTH FOR FIFTEEN DAYS TILL HE REGAINED HIS LOST LUSTRE.
INDRA THEN CAME DOWN—
FOR YOUR VALOUR AND MIGHT, YOU DESERVE A BOON EACH. ASK FOR ONE THAT IS NOT AVAILABLE TO MEN.
BESTOW ALL THE WEAPONS ON ME WITH THE KNOWL-EDGE OF HOW TO USE THEM.
MAY MY FRIENDSHIP WITH ARJUNA LAST FOR EVER.
SO BE IT, KRISHNA. AND YOU ARJUNA, SHALL RECEIVE THE WEAPONS WHEN YOU NEED THEM MOST.


AS INDRA WENT AWAY, IT WAS AGNI'S TURN TO BESTOW A REWARD—
I HAVE BEEN GRATIFIED BY YOU. YOU SHALL, AT MY COMMAND, BE ABLE TO TRAVEL ANYWHERE AT WILL.
WHEN AGNI LEFT, ARJUNA, KRISHNA AND MAYA RELAXED ON THE BANK OF A RIVER.
O ARJUNA, YOU PROTECTED ME FROM THE WRATH OF KRISHNA AND AGNI. TELL ME WHAT I CAN DO FOR YOU.
BE EVER WELL-DISPOSED TO US, MAYA, AS WE ARE TO YOU.
BUT I MUST DO SOMETHING FOR YOU.
WELL, KRISHNA, WHAT CAN WE ASK OF OUR FRIEND?
MAYA, YOU ARE THE GREAT ARCHITECT OF THE ASURAS. WHY DON'T YOU BUILD A SABHA* FOR YUDHISHTHIRA? BUILD ONE THAT WILL BE UNSURPASSED IN SPLENDOUR.

* HALL





AND THAT WAS HOW YUDHISHTHIRA ACQUIRED THE MAGNIFICENT HALL THAT BECAME THE LAST STRAW FOR HIS ALREADY ENVIOUS COUSINS, THE KAURAVAS, AND INDUCED THEM TO DECEITFULLY DEPRIVE YUDHISHTHIRA OF HIS KINGDOM.


ARJUNA HUMBLED
AH! KRISHNA, NOW THAT THE GANDIVA BOW IS MINE, NO ONE CAN DEFEAT ME. EVEN INDRA WAS HELPLESS AGAINST MY ARROWS!
ARJUNA, THE PANDAVA, HAD COME TO VISIT KRISHNA AT DWARKA.
SUDDENLY, THEY HEARD A LOUD CRY.
WHAT'S THAT SOUND?
SEEING A BRAHMAN OUTSIDE, THEY WENT TO HIM —
WHAT IS TROUBLING YOU, FRIEND?
EIGHT TIMES HAVE I APPEALED TO OUR KING TO SAVE MY DEAD SONS AND EIGHT TIMES HAS HE IGNORED ME! NOW I HAVE LOST MY NINTH SON!


THOUGH HE IS A WARRIOR, HE IS FOND OF PLEASURE. IF HE HAD CONTROL OVER HIMSELF, WOULD HE BE SO CALLOUS?
A KING SHOULD PROTECT HIS SUBJECTS FROM EVERY CALAMITY INCLUDING DEATH. RESTORE MY SON TO ME, I IMPLORE YOU!
WHY DOESN'T KRISHNA RESPOND? HAS HE LOST ALL COMPASSION?
WHEN THE BRAHMAN CONTINUED TO LAMENT, ARJUNA COULD NO LONGER BEAR IT.
DON'T GRIEVE, MY FRIEND. I WILL PROTECT THE NEXT SON BORN TO YOU. IF I FAIL, I WILL BURN MYSELF ON A PYRE FOR MAKING A FALSE PROMISE.
THE BRAHMAN LOOKED SCEPTICALLY AT HIM.
WHEN BALARAMA, PRADYUMNA AND ANIRUDDHA—ALL MIGHTY WARRIORS—COULD NOT PROTECT MY SONS, HOW CAN YOU?


ARJUNA'S VANITY WAS STUNG.
I MAY NOT BE YOUR BALARAMA OR KRISHNA — BUT I AM ARJUNA, THE PANDAVA, AND I WIELD THE GANDIVA BOW.
I WILL SAVE YOUR SON FOR YOU. I WILL DEFEAT EVEN YAMA, THE GOD OF DEATH, IF NECESSARY.
NOW GO HOME AND LET ME KNOW WHEN YOUR WIFE IS ABOUT TO DELIVER HER TENTH CHILD. I WILL WAIT IN DWARKA TILL THEN.
SOME TIME LATER—
ARJUNA! COME! IT IS TIME! PLEASE SAVE MY SON FROM THE CLUTCHES OF DEATH.
ARJUNA SNATCHED THE GANDIVA BOW...
...AND WENT WITH THE BRAHMAN.


THERE! MY WIFE IS LYING IN THAT HUT.
ARJUNA RAISED HIS BOW . . .
. . . AND COVERED THE HUT WITH A THICK NETWORK OF ARROWS.
THEN HE STOOD GUARD OUTSIDE.
NOW LET US SEE IF THE LORD OF DEATH CAN DARE ENTER THE HUT.
SUDDENLY—
WAH-AH-AH!
AH! A BABY'S CRY! MY TENTH SON HAS SURVIVED!


WHERE'S THE BABY? WHY ARE YOU WEEPING?
HE... HE... CRIED A LITTLE AFTER HE WAS BORN... AND... THEN... JUST VANISHED!
THE BRAHMAN RUSHED OUT OF THE HUT LIKE ONE POSSESSED.
WHERE IS MY SON? BEFORE I HAD AT LEAST, BEHELD MY DEAD CHILDREN. THIS TIME I DIDN'T EVEN SEE MY CHILD!
YOU HAD PROMISED TO SAVE MY CHILD! YOU HAVE BROKEN YOUR PROMISE!
BE PATIENT, FRIEND. I'LL BRING YOUR SON BACK TO YOU.
MOUNTING HIS CHARIOT, ARJUNA SEARCHED HIGH...


... AND LOW. BUT NOWHERE COULD HE FIND THE BRAHMAN'S SON.
I'D BETTER RETURN AND GIVE UP MY LIFE. I HAVE FAILED.
I CAN SEE YOU HAVE FAILED. WHY HAVE YOU COME BACK?
TO FULFIL THE SECOND HALF OF MY PROMISE.
ARJUNA SOON HAD A PYRE PREPARED.


AS HE WAS ABOUT TO JUMP INTO IT—
WAIT, ARJUNA!
DO NOT PUNISH YOURSELF. I WILL SHOW YOU WHERE THE BRAHMAN'S SONS ARE. COME WITH ME.
THE BEMUSED ARJUNA GOT INTO THE CHARIOT—
WE WILL GO TOWARDS THE WEST.
THEY DROVE ON TILL THEY CAME TO THE REGIONS OF THE NIGHT.
OH! I CAN'T SEE A THING! ARE YOU THERE KRISHNA? HAS THE CHARIOT STOPPED?
THE HORSES HAVE STOPPED BECAUSE OF THE BLINDING DARKNESS.


KRISHNA RAISED HIS DISCUS—
GO, SUDARSHANA! LIGHT OUR PATH.
KRISHNA'S DISCUS WHIRRED ON AHEAD CUTTING WITH ITS OWN LUSTRE A BRIGHT PATH THROUGH THE DARKNESS.
SOON THEY REACHED THE OCEAN OF MILK, THE ABODE OF VISHNU. KRISHNA BOWED TO THE LORD, OF WHOM HE WAS BUT A PART.
ARJUNA STOOD DAZED FOR A MOMENT. THEN HE, TOO, BOWED IN REVERENCE.
I HAD THESE BRAHMAN BOYS BROUGHT HERE ONLY TO GIVE YOU AN OPPORTUNTY TO COME HERE. SLAY THE ASURAS AND HELP PRESERVE THE DIVINE LAW. THAT IS YOUR MISSION. AFTER FINISHING IT, COME BACK QUICKLY TO ME.


AH! KRISHNA, YOU KNEW ALL ALONG THAT THEY WERE HERE! NO WONDER YOU WERE SILENT AND UNMOVED.
AND THEN ARJUNA REALISED WHY THIS WHOLE DRAMA HAD BEEN PLAYED.
O KRISHNA, I NOW UNDERSTAND. WHATEVER MANLINESS AND POWERS A MAN MAY HAVE, IT IS ALL THROUGH THE GRACE OF GOD. FORGIVE ME MY VANITY.
TAKING THEIR LEAVE OF VISHNU, KRISHNA AND ARJUNA PUT THE TEN SONS OF THE BRAHMAN IN THE CHARIOT AND LEFT FOR DWARAKA.
IT IS FAITH IN GOD AND HUMILITY THAT ULTIMATELY WINS OUR BATTLES FOR US, ARJUNA, NOT VANITY OR SKILL ALONE.